6: McFee E-4,5 (1959-1967) 1972 NF6 Blackfoot NF6



The tribe is both a political entity with legislative, judicial, and executive powers, and a business corporation. The Corporate Charter of the Blackfeet Tribe establishes the tribe's sphere of authority over the handling of funds and the use of tribal assets for the benefit of its members. All tribal members are shareholders in the corporation and have a vote in its affairs. The nine members of the tribal council direct both the political and business affairs of the tribe and the corporation (U.S., Blackfeet Corporate Charter 1936).

Councilmen are elected by the secret ballot of eligible tribal members and serve for a period of two years. Each council supervises the voting and defines the boundaries of the election districts for the election of its successor body. Four districts are regularly recognized and each is served by an established number of councilmen. Since an amendment to the tribal constitution in 1964 reducing the Council from thirteen to nine members, Browning district is represented by three councilmen, and Seville, Heart Butte and Old Agency by two each (*Glacier Reporter*, July 2, 1964). Candidates file for election in the district in which they reside, but each voter votes for candidates from all districts. Residents of one district, therefore, may have a strong voice in deciding who will represent the voters of another district.

The tribal council elects its own officers, appoints its own court officers and police, and hires its secretarial and administrative staff. This body has been given broad powers for political and economic action within limits reserved by law to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior. Tribal actions concerning disposal of trust lands, and involving tribal credit or expenditures above an established amount are subject to review or approval by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs or his representatives.

Tribal membership legally defines a person as a Blackfeet Indian, and such membership provides a set of privileges and liabilities not shared by nonmembers. The income derived by a tribal member from crops raised on trust land, or the proceeds from the sale of stock grazed on trust land, are not subject to federal income taxes (Federal Indian Law 1958:883). All lands held in trust by the federal government are exempt from local and state property taxes. Qualified tribal members are given preference over nonmembers in the awarding of grazing or farming leases of trust land, and tribal members, like other Indians of ¼ or more degree Indian descent, are given a preference credit in applications for employment by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. These are a few of the privileges that go with tribal membership. As members of the corporation, the people also share in the earnings of the corporation. Occasionally, more frequently in the past when oil exploration was more active, the council votes a per capita payment as a distribution of tribal income in excess of that required for the operational expenses.

Such privileges are offset by some liabilities—particularly for men who feel competent to handle their own affairs. Trust lands must be leased through the agency land office and all use, leasing, procurement of fee patent titles, and sale of land come under government supervision. The man who has his land held in trust must request and receive permission to make certain uses of his land, have his plans reviewed and approved more often, go through more red tape, than the man who has a fee patent title to his land.

16: Hanks & Hanks E,P-4,5 (1938-1941) 1950
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## CHAPTER THREE

# The Economy

SINCE we are as much concerned with welfare as with the structure of an economic system, we have divided our considerations into the following parts: (1) the annual round; (2) sources of income; (3) exchange; (4) distributing mechanisms; (5) expenditures; (6) distribution of wealth and social classes.

In general the economy is managed by the agent. Acting as his executors are nine white employees who carry on activities varying from book-keeping to directing the sowing of the crops. All but two of the white employees are paid salaries from the trust fund; the exceptions are the senior and junior clerk who, along with the agent, are paid by the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources.

The authority of this white staff in controlling the economy of the reserve is derived not only from the sanctions of Canadian law; it also issues from the hard fact that these men control employment and the rewards of labour which are cash and purchase orders on village stores. The methods of control which they use, however, vary with the type of work and the personalities involved. At the mines where operations are localized, supervision by the mining instructor is relatively easy. The farming instructors, however, who must travel many miles over the reserve, cannot easily remove a man from his farm, and can only issue orders without being able to superintend in person their execution. Within these limits the instructors' actions vary from laissez-faire to authoritative. Their ability to elicit co-operation and their individual prestige depend upon the example of industriousness they themselves set, their tact in giving orders, and the personal warmth they manifest towards the Indians.

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A yearly total of $5,880 is paid fourteen Indians for these permanent jobs. The wages for the interpreters and the scouts for the Mounted Police are paid by the Dominion government. The assistant stockmen are paid with funds from the sale of beef. Those connected with the mines are paid from the operating revenue of the mines. The hospital worker alone is paid directly from the trust fund as part of the operating cost of the hospital. 463 465 657

These jobs[A] are filled by application to the person under whose jurisdiction the job falls, e.g., the white stock-man or, at the mines, the Indian "room-boss." With the exception of the hospital assistant these jobs do not require work six days of the week. At the stock-farm, for instance, a man wishing to leave for a few days may give his job to another. This is used as an argument by whites to show that the Indians are lackadaisical. However, the fact that these jobs are seldom open, and that seven of these jobs have been filled by the same Indian for over five years suggests the contrary. Some Indians do work constantly at certain jobs. 466 657

(3) Temporary jobs on the reserve are of two kinds: those handled by the agency or the white employees and those directed by the Indians themselves. 464 657

Temporary jobs handled by the agency or the white employees are filled by application to or at the request of the director involved. They depend on the season and the exigencies of the moment. They may involve greasing a tractor, painting a building (a man is even paid for painting his own house), mending a road, cleaning a corral or a well, or stopping leaks in a roof. No doubt individual competence and industriousness play a part in securing these jobs. The farm instructor who knows that an Indian is careful and efficient in his work is more apt to employ him than one who is less reliable. Availability is another factor. A man who lived near the stock corral said he never was without a job when he wished one, as the stockman always came to him first when in need of help. The agent, too, occasionally gives a needy Indian a note addressed to a particular white employee asking that he be employed. Consistent with this policy of giving jobs to the needy, some Indians with considerable cash in their accounts at the agency are not employed at the agency-controlled jobs. The agency allocates approximately $7,000 as wages to Indians for temporary jobs. This sum comes from a variety of sources such as deduction from the income from cattle or grain as well as from interest on trust funds. 466 657 [463] 652 651

A [i.e., permanent jobs on the reserve--Analyst]

465 The returns to the workers for these jobs vary; some jobs pay by the hour or day, others on a contract basis when the job is finished. Jobs by the week pay $6 to $10, depending on their complexity. Running the tractor pays nearly $10, repairing a broken culvert not so much. Painting a building and shed recently brought $25 to the painter, and took about two weeks. Of the seven Indians whose income we investigated, only three were employed on such temporary jobs; these three earned during the year totals of $16, $24, and $45.

464 The number of jobs available varies with the time of year. Before the Sun Dance in June, when most Indians are eager to obtain more money, jobs are scarce. On the other hand, in the fall the demand for workers is quite great, there being a need both in agriculture and at the mines. It is hard to get interpreters and seventy-year-old informants then. Some individuals, however, report themselves chronically unable to obtain jobs at any season: one man stated that he was shunted from mining instructor to agent to farm instructor for eight days before he could get work.

466 Jobs for wages under Indian management differ from the same jobs under white management with respect to requirements for taking the jobs, wages, and obligations of employer and employee. With Indians a job is not solely a contract to carry out certain services in return for wages. Hiring is by invitation. The relation of employer and employee to each other implies warm affection, mutual sharing, and concern over the future welfare of the other. The following case illustrates this relationship:

466 After getting out of school, Philip worked for his brother-in-law, an Indian who was farming one of the largest acreages on the reserve. Philip was paid one third of the return from the crop plus food, clothing and housing. He was given per-
465 mission to use his employer's team and wagon in order to earn extra money which he would share with his employer. From time to time Philip's employer would give him $5 to $10 which he spent as he wished. When the crop came in Philip received about $100.

466 This is fairly typical. A frequent requirement for candidates for a job is blood or affinal relationship to the employer and that the employee be younger than the employer. Behaviour is patterned in accordance with the usual younger brother-older brother rela-
466 tions in the kinship system. The cash wages are uncertain in amount
465 and frequency of payment. However, when the employer has cash, he is expected to give some to his employee. In addition the em-

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ployee expects to be fed, housed, and sometimes also clothed; he hands over his own rations and occasionally contributes to the larder from his own money. There are further mutual obligations. An employer or employee would be considered wanting if he did not make an occasional gift of a shirt or tobacco to the other. The use of teams and wagons is frequently extended to the employee by the employer for going to town or making extra money. Should the employee wish to marry, he is expected to consult his employer as well as his own parents and, if approval is given, the employer, like the boy's parents, makes a present to the bride's family. After the marriage the bride is expected to live in the employer's house and help with the housework. If the employee is going to leave his job permanently, perhaps to start a farm of his own, the employer helps him with horses, furniture, or farm equipment. An employer who did not perform these duties would be much criticized.

About one half of the Indian farmers and certainly the one Indian stock-raiser employ young men during the year to help them on this basis. Horse-raisers are apt to need help all year round. The wages paid are difficult to estimate. Only one Indian pays regularly in cash; he pays $20 per month plus food and lodging. There seems to be no definite wage scale; frequently food and lodging is all that is expected plus occasional gifts of spending money. This is particularly the case where the job is short-lived. To convert these wages into cash is difficult and in a sense meaningless, but we estimate that the wages come to about $137 per year. The estimate is made on the basis of 50 cents for groceries per week, $35 for clothing, and $50 a year for spending money.

The number engaged in this kind of work is uncertain. It consists of a large portion of the male population between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. These young men have little or no property of their own and work out in this manner or on their father's place until they get their own farms. Probably fifty young men are so engaged.

*Trapping.* Though hunting is neither a source of income nor of diversion today, there are about five Indians who annually secure a $1 licence from the agency to trap muskrats and beavers. In February and March these men set their traps and, acting as bosses, induce others to trap too. When there are about 100 skins, the man with the licence takes the catch to the agency which forwards the

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still more. Tracks, cars, mechanical conveniences were bought second-hand. Each year improvements were made, and the former farm instructor was changed to a mining instructor with salary paid from the gross returns of the mines. Today on the reserve there is only one individually operated, primitive-type mine that still functions.

Around the chute from the main mine is a grove of trees that runs to the river banks. In this grove cabins have been built to house the Indians that flock there each fall as work begins. In accordance with the Mining Act, showers with running water were built at trust expense. A laundry, and somewhat later a church, were built. Now an active community of about fifty families lives near the mine during the production season. In 1941 there was a boarding-house with a Blackfoot woman as cook for bachelors who could eat at $3 plus rations per week. Another man made it his business to call at the rather distant ration house every week to get the busy miners' meat; he charged 25 cents for his service. A man with a car ran a taxi service the nine miles to Cluny; he charged 35 cents for a trip to town. Throughout the week the men work an average of eight hours a day, but if more coal is needed, they may work overtime into the night. On week-ends people come from the surrounding parts of the reserve to visit or to attend the hand game or Deer Dance.

The mine operates on a self-sustaining basis, all costs coming from its gross revenue. It produces about 10,000 tons of coal annually and derives a gross income from it of about $25,000, coal selling from $2.00 to $3.50 per ton. Of the total revenue about 50 per cent goes for wages to the miners, the rest for operation and maintenance.

The system of operation is an adaptation from the days of individually operated mines; the mining instructor makes a contract with a man at $1.60 per ton for all coal which he produces from a given room. This Indian thus becomes foreman of the room in question, hires his own men, furnishes a certain part of the equipment, and divides the amount made with his workers at the end of the week. There are eight rooms operating under contract, and at maximum output eighty men are employed.

Operation and maintenance include paying the wages of the mine instructor ($1,500), a clerk ($300), and three men hired at 30 cents per hour to do sundry jobs other than the extraction of coal. The

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316 mine offers for sale at cost such necessary equipment as dynamite, picks, fuses, etc. These are purchased by the miner or room boss, the cost being deducted from the sum he receives for coal. Developmental work such as the opening of new rooms, laying of new tracks, timbering, and purchase of cars is paid for from the operating fund.

316 To work at the mine an Indian usually goes in late September or early October when the demand for coal is greatest. Assuming 466 that he has obtained a job by applying to the room foreman, the new miner must make an initial outlay of about $35 for equipment. A miner's cap, carbide, flints, a pick, etc., come to $25, and this is deducted in small amounts from the pay of the room where he is working, being passed on to the new miner as deductions from his 316 weekly wage. The average miner in good weeks when coal is in 465 demand will make between $6 and $10 a week. Most men work only a few weeks in order to obtain cash, and quit when they have what 316 they need. Others have built more of their existence around the 464 weekly pay and work steadily all winter. Certain applicants have [164] been discouraged by the doctor from doing this work even part-time in view of the all-too-frequent tendency towards tuberculosis. It is not, therefore, a field open to everyone.

316 The total income from the mines is limited among other things by the available market. Most towns in southern Alberta have mines in the vicinity, and the town fathers have made ordinances forbidding the peddling within town limits of coal originating elsewhere than in their specified areas. The Blackfoot mine produces coal for the reserve and most of the area adjoining the eastern end of the reserve. This includes white farms in the vicinity, the reserve schools, the agency, the Blackfoot households and any trucker who may come asking for a few tons. However, this is the only market for the coal at present, and there is little immediate prospect of its increasing.

489 Formerly Indians could make $5 or more per week by hauling [434] and peddling their coal in adjacent towns. This secondary source of income has been prevented by the town ordinances mentioned and by the difficulty of Indians competing with trucks. The only hauling [434] job left involves taking coal to the agency and schools. Though this pays $2 per load, it takes relatively few trips to provide for these needs.

231 (2) *Horse raising.* A visitor will be struck by the large number [422] of unbroken horses that roam the reserve. These animals all bear the Blackfoot brand, a lazy "S," and a number indicating the particular owner.

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presence of certain witnesses. Today the agent encourages the making of wills in his presence while a man is still in sound health; this document is then filed at the agency until the testator's death.[1] Thereby property acquired through trust funds may change hands, e.g., work horses, wagons, etc. These distributing mechanisms have been introduced to the reserve by whites and are for the most part foreign to the culture.

Fundamental to the Blackfoot distributing system is one central concept which appears in some form in many institutions. It is the Plains concept of the virtue of generosity. To most Blackfoot Indians wealth is not so important in terms of accumulation of property as for the prestige and security that can be acquired by giving it away. Many Indians of prominence appear to lack the symbols of wealth that we find necessary, e.g., good furniture, new clothes, many horses, etc. They may not be wealthy in terms of property possessed, but they are wealthy in terms of the prestige acquired from having given away their property. However, unlike the potlatches of the north-west coast, the Blackfoot emphasize not a single large demonstration of generosity but a continuous show of it. This means that one must be sagacious and resourceful in handling affairs so that one can give away much but still have enough to continue the show. The criticism and self-criticism of many formerly wealthy Indians was not that they were not generous but that they were unable to continue the generosity. This feature is basic to an understanding of Blackfoot economic distributing systems.

In our discussion of income we mentioned certain Indian entrepreneurs[2] who make comfortable livings mainly through the sale of horses. Such persons also manage a system of distribution. They must have men to care for the herd, and these "hired" men are provided with food, clothing, and shelter in return for their services. Also, however, the indigent members of the young men's families are cared for by the entrepreneurs, and it is here that the concept of generosity becomes important. These needy people constitute a market for generosity. The greater the entrepreneur's income the greater the generosity he can show and the larger the number of persons who are eager for it.

Boy Chief's establishment exemplified such a system. Although he had a few cattle, his main cash income derived from the horses

[1] It is uncertain whether a copy of the will must be forwarded to Ottawa. Since valuable property is presumably held by the band, probating by the Departmental Solicitor may not be necessary on the Blackfoot reserve.

[2] Cf. pp. 72-73; 77.

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which he raised and trained to the saddle. He had three men more or less constantly with him. They and their wives were provided with meals, lodging, spending money, and the use of horses. In addition he provided for five old people who had no other means of support. They lived in houses near him, were given occasional blankets and clothing, accompanied him when he went to the Sun Dance or the Tobacco Dance, where they lived in his tipi and were given, when occasion demanded, groceries over and above the rations. While their grandsons drove the horses into the corral, these old dependents passed the afternoon swapping stories with Boy Chief. We estimate that on the reserve there are five such systems of economic flow centring about an entrepreneur.

These entrepreneurs may be considered the lingering exemplifications of the old band system. Like them the old band chiefs would provide a source of income for their bands: it might be harvesting with hay, planting gardens, running a ferry, or extracting coal. To the band chief came young men who performed the main tasks involved in return for their keep and, when necessary, for the clothing and feeding of their relatives. With the advent of the farms and the scattering of people over the reserve, these bands dissipated, so that the system persists today only in a few cases, though it continues as an ideal for many entrepreneurs. The band is now almost a meaningless concept to those under thirty; it is solely a named section in the brief annual circle camp where an individual sets his tent. The function of the band as a distributive system has been assumed by the family. It assumes a characteristic pattern when the head of a prosperous family has his circle of dependent relatives who furnish him a market for generosity in return for homage. This function of the family differs from that of the entrepreneurs in that the entrepreneur may provide for persons outside the family group. The main trend today is away from the entrepreneur system towards having each family care for its own members.

In addition to providing for its indigents, the family contains a system of relationships to its own members that makes for distribution. We need not describe here in detail the Blackfoot kinship system[1] with its various obligations, but a few examples will illustrate. We have already noted that kinship may be a prerequisite for one Indian to hire another. A haying gang consists frequently of a man with horses and wagons helped by his younger brothers,

[1]For analysis of the Blackfoot kinship system, cf. L. M. Hanks, Jr. and Jane Richardson, "Blackfoot Kinship," American Ethnological Society, Monograph IX, 1945.

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602 brothers-in-law, and sons. One's generosity is shown by fine gifts
43 to a father-in-law and a mother-in-law, and by treating one's younger
brother in school to a movie. Wives buy things not only for their
466 children but for their sisters' children. A man invites his brother-
602 in-law to dine at a Chinese restaurant. All of these cases reveal
431 segments of the intra-familial system of circulating wealth.

To estimate the amount of wealth per year passing through the family is difficult. Part of the groceries, clothing, and household expenses passes through this channel. More than half of the gifts that are made go to relatives. In terms of volume the family is probably the most important distributive mechanism on the reserve, even more important than the agency.

593 Near extinction, though not completely dead, is the institution
858 of the favoured child (*mini.puka*) which centres about the family.
431 Horses and blankets were given out lavishly in the name of the child. A wealthy father rewarded many times over the giver of a gift to his favourite child. A trifling object such as a bell might in the past be rewarded with a horse or a suit of buckskin clothing. Thus the favoured child institution was a special aspect of distribution where generosity was reciprocated by generosity without possibility of
593 comparable return. Though there are many who have been favoured
858 children in the past, only two children have that status today. The
177 schools are blamed for this because the children are taken away from their parents. The children themselves, caught in the set of values established by the school, no longer seek the favours that Indian parents give. A lad who has spent twelve years under Anglican or Roman Catholic influence finds it difficult to appreciate the gift of a Medicine Pipe and asks to be spared the honour.

585 Marriage may constitute a mechanism of distribution, if one of
431 the Blackfoot patterns is followed. Of three first marriages observed, one followed this pattern. The main feature is an exchange of presents between the two contracting families. The bride's family in a recent marriage gave eight horses which they had collected from various relatives. The groom's family, obligated to an equal return gift, could only collect six horses; accordingly a "democrat" and a wardrobe were thrown in. As far as possible those relatives who contributed are given something in return; the immediate family must go without in case of inadequate return gift, while the more distant relatives receive in proportion to their contributions. Among

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unified control began. The farmer was handed his seed grain and was paid by the agency to plough and sow his land. The cash returns were doled out at the discretion of the agency. Similar control was extended to haying and trapping operations. The agency controls almost every job for cash wages, to say nothing of the all-important periodic issues of farm equipment, horses, clothing, and food.

During the eighties and nineties of the preceding century, gardening, haying, and cattle raising were carried out under the direction of an Indian head-man who supervised the requisite operations, disposed of the product, and paid his men partly in welfare benefits and services. But today each Indian is an individual worker for the agency. The bargaining position of the head-man and his gang is gone. The operation is fixed; the disposal of the product is out of the hands of the worker; and the returns from his labour bring in cash only. He is paid to work his own land and maintain his own house. There remains only the option of accepting the opportunity to work, or chancing agency disapproval and subsisting on rations.

Except for the agency's primary obligation for the welfare of the Indians and its lack of special interest in showing a profit, its role is similar to that of a business enterprise. An important goal is to develop the reserve using wherever possible the labour resources of the resident population. The criteria of successful management, like a balance sheet for directors and stockholders, are its annual reports of production and income that go to Ottawa. When these figures stand high, administrative responsibility has been fulfilled, and the organization that is run for the benefit of the Indians is deemed to be doing its best. It brings the Indians the maximum returns, and they, by participating as labourers and receiving the net cash returns, are provided with their living.

The Blackfoot's standard of living has undoubtedly been raised. Through careful planning they have few lean months and more than just annuities as a backlog for depressed years. The poor are neither so threadbare as those found on other reserves, nor are the wealthy living in idle luxury. This result has not been brought about solely by managerial considerations of efficiency; the Indians themselves urged many a paternalistic feature, in the interest of retaining and extending this basic guarantee of subsistence.

(2) The former groups under a head-man or chief constituted not only the co-operative labour battalion but the group among